

Questions & Answers:

The Yonkers Landmarks Preservation Ordinance

- **What is the Landmarks Ordinance?**

The Landmarks Ordinance is a Law passed by the City Council in August of 1991. It is designed to protect and preserve properties that are important in Yonkers' history. Under the law a Landmarks Board was established. It reviews applications and nominates properties and areas for designation as landmarks or historic districts. The Board also has the responsibility to regulate changes to properties designated as landmarks or located in historic districts.

- **Why was the Landmarks Ordinance enacted?**

The City Council passed the Landmarks Ordinance at the request of a number of neighborhoods and community groups who felt buildings and neighborhoods important in Yonkers' history were being lost through demolition and uncontrolled alterations and development. The Landmarks Ordinance provides the public with the opportunity to protect the City of Yonkers' architectural, historical, and cultural heritage.

- **Do other communities have landmark laws?**

Almost 2,000 communities in the United States have adopted laws to protect historic properties and neighborhoods. Local landmark laws have been found to be the most beneficial way to safeguard the best of a community's heritage while allowing necessary development to take place.

- **Why should the city be concerned with historic buildings and neighborhoods?**

The protection and preservation of Yonkers' architectural, cultural and historic resources serves the following purposes:

- safeguards the city's heritage;
- helps stabilize and improve property values;
- fosters civic pride in the accomplishments and beauty of the city;
- protects and enhances the city's attractions to tourists and visitors; thereby benefiting business and industry;
- promotes the use of historic buildings and neighborhoods for the education, pleasure, and welfare of the people of Yonkers.

- **What is the Landmarks Board?**

The Landmarks Board is the city agency that is responsible for identifying and nominating properties in Yonkers for designation under the Landmarks Ordinance. The Board also regulates and proposed change, alteration, new construction, or demolition that will affect a property that has been officially designated by the City Council as a landmark or that is located within a designated historic district.

- **Who are the members of the Landmarks Board?**

The Landmarks Board consists of eleven Yonkers Residents appointed by the Mayor with the approval of the City Council. The Board includes one member associated with the Yonkers Historical Society, two members who are licensed architects, two who are city planners, archeologists, historians, or preservationists, and a member who is a licensed realtor. Members serve with no compensation.

- **What is a Landmark?**

A landmark is an individual property that has been designated by the City Council.

Under the Landmarks Ordinance, a landmark must:

- be associated with persons or events of significance to the city, region, state, or nation;
- be illustrative of historic growth and development of the city, region, state, or nation;
- embody specific characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or represent the work of a master; or
- contain unique architectural, archeological, or artistic qualities.

- **What is a historic district?**

A historic district is an area or neighborhood that has been designated by the City Council. Under the law, a historic district is a group of properties that has special character and special historic value and that represent one or more periods or styles of art or architecture typical of one or more of past eras.

- **How are landmarks and districts designated?**

Any person or organization can make an application to have a property designated a landmark or an area of the city designated a historic district.

Once an application is received, the Landmarks Preservation Board determines whether the application meets the technical requirements for landmarking established by law. If it does, the property owner is notified and a public hearing is held at which supporters and opponents may express their opinions and have them placed on public record. If the Board decides that a property or area of the city meets the criteria established by the law for landmarking, it sends the report to the City Council recommending designation. The City Council then decides whether to accept the Board's recommendation and make the designation or to reject it and not make the designation. The Council may also decide that more information is needed before it makes its final decision.

During this process, a moratorium is placed on the issuing of all city permits and licenses that may affect the property or area proposed for landmarking. This moratorium cannot exceed 180 days after the acceptance of an application by the Landmarks Board.

- **What does it mean to me if my property is designated a landmark or is located in an area that has been designated a historic district?**

If your property has been designated a landmark or is located within a designated historic district, it means that the city has found that your property is an important part of Yonkers' historical and architectural heritage.

The Landmarks Board can offer you free technical advice as to the best way to maintain and repair your property as well how to make appropriate changes. To help protect landmarks from inappropriate changes and destruction, the Board must approve any alteration, reconstruction, demolition, or new construction affecting designated properties.

- **Can the Landmarks Board make me restore my building to the way it looked when it was first built?**

No. The Landmarks Board regulates only those changes that are proposed to a property after it has been designated. The Board cannot make a property owner restore a building to the way it looked before it was designated. Future changes, however are subject to review and approval by the Board.

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- **Why does the Landmarks Board review changes to designated properties?**
The Landmarks Board reviews all proposed changes to evaluate their effect on the architectural and historical character of the property or the historic district. The Board's duty is to ensure that any proposed changes are appropriate and will not damage the character of the landmark or historic district. Changes that are reviewed by the Board include, but are not limited to, alterations, new construction and demolition.

- **Will landmark designation prevent all alterations and new construction?**
No. Landmark designation does not "freeze" a building or an area. Alterations, demolition, and new construction may still take place, but the Landmarks Board must review the changes and find them appropriate. The Board recognizes that at times changes and alterations are necessary. The review process, however, helps ensure that the special qualities of designated properties are not compromised or destroyed.

- **If my property is designated, a landmark or located in a historic district, do I need the permission of the Landmarks Board before I make changes?**
Yes. The Landmarks Board must approve in advance any restoration, alteration, reconstruction, demolition, or new construction affecting any designated property, including all properties in historic districts.

You need to obtain the Board's permission before you begin any exterior work. Permission is needed whether or not a building permit is required.

- **What are some of the factors that the Landmarks Board considers when it reviews proposed changes and alterations?**
In its evaluation the Landmarks Board employs criteria that have been well established by the historic preservation field and used by similar boards in other cities. Among factors considered in its review are the appropriateness compatibility of any change with the defining elements of the landmarked property, such as its size, scale, materials, texture, orientation and period of significance.

- **If my property is designated, will I have to allow strangers onto my property or into my house?**
No. An owner of a designated property retains all rights to privacy. You need not let anyone onto your property or into your house.

- **What are the benefits of owning a property in historic district?**
The Yonkers Landmarks Preservation Ordinance is a progressive step to preserve and protect the best features of our neighborhoods. Historic district designation stabilizes neighborhoods and property values. Owners of properties located in a historic district are assured that the qualities that make their neighborhood attractive and desirable will be maintained and preserved.

- **Where can I obtain further information concerning landmarks and historic districts in Yonkers?**
Anyone who has questions is encouraged to write to the Landmarks Preservation Board at 87 Nepperhan Avenue, Room 311, Yonkers, New York 10701 or telephone the Board's staff at (914) 377- 6555.